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ABSTRACT

A collaborative program between the Fort Worth Independent School District (Texas) and several regional private and public colleges to alleviate district teacher shortages is described in this paper. The Cooperative Teacher Aide-Scholar Program, which developed instructional aides into certified classroom teachers, provided participants with an annual stipend and paid leave time dependent upon maintenance of an acceptable grade point average. All school personnel are now eligible, and a substantial proportion of minority candidates are enrolled. Financial and academic support is provided by regional universities. A conclusion is that although the teacher shortage has not yet abated, the program is reasonable and achievable. (LMI)

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The Cooperative Teacher Aide-Scholar Program

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In July of 1988, the Fort Worth Independent School District embarked upon an exciting new program to cure teacher shortages in the district. The Cooperative Teacher Aide-Scholar Program was conceived by then Assistant Superintendent for Personnel, Jo Ann Houston, and approved by the Board of Education in July of 1988. This program was a collaborative effort between a public school system, the local community college district, Tarrant County Junior College, Texas Christian University, and Texas Wesleyan University, both private colleges in our community, and the University of North Texas, the regional state-supported university in our area.

The idea behind the program was to take instructional aides who were already involved and knowledgeable in the school system and develop them into certified classroom teachers. This was an exciting concept based on the idea that 600 instructional aides worked for the FWISD. A survey of this population found that some of them already had substantial numbers of college hours and were interested in becoming certified classroom teachers.

Upon approval of the program, these aides were all invited to apply to join this very special program. The district committed to give them time away from the job without loss of pay to attend classes as well as an annual stipend for an additional 12 hours of college coursework earned each 12 months. The response was tremendous. The entry requirements were 60 hours of college coursework, a minimum 2.75

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cumulative grade point average, and be able to enroll in college classes for the fall of 1988. After hurried interviews, a group of 25 select instructional aides were selected to begin the first program.

Also, we set about to identify 10 new employees that would join the district as part of the program. The participating colleges and universities were able to recommend students from their own population to fill these job positions. Actually the program got off to a roaring start. It was an idea whose time had come. During the first year, a total of 28 instructional aides were a part of the program. Incidentally 14 were black and 14 were Hispanic. Eighteen were current employees who met the criteria and who were just too good to turn away. Ten new employees were brought into the district during the initial year.

An advisory group of the deans of education from the participating institutions of higher education and district representatives meets regularly to monitor the program.

Each year, the program has been revised. The initial 60 hour entry requirement was reduced to 30 hours and the initial 2.75 grade point average was reduced to 2.5. However, anyone achieving 60 hours or more must maintain a 2.75 GPA. The focus of the program has been broadened to include not only instructional aides but also administrative secretaries, educational secretaries, and campus monitors as well as bus drivers and janitors. The feeling is that people who work in and are dedicated to the

school environment will have a greater interest in becoming teachers and such an interest can be developed and cultivated. Currently in our program, 42 persons are studying for degrees and teacher certification. Out of this group, five are secretaries, and 3 are campus monitors.

To get a real idea of the quality of people that are involved in this program, I would like for you to meet Dorothy Lampkin. Dorothy is a 23-year veteran of the Special Education Department of the FWISD. She has worked as an instructional aide with multi-handicapped children, and we are very excited at the possibility that within another year Dorothy will be able to assume the position of a certified classroom teacher in the FWISD.

Another veteran of the school district, Betty Washington, has been with the district 16 years at the elementary level, and middle school level, and currently is working as an aide at the secondary level at Poly High School.

Linda Mosley, who is currently president of the FWISD Association of School Secretaries, is another one of our accomplished Cooperative Teacher Aide-Scholars. Linda has worked for the district for 16 years as a secretary and currently works as secretary to the Director of Auditing at the central administration building. Linda is working furiously toward completion of her teacher certification courses in 1992. She will continue her coursework and be granted her certificate from Texas Christian University.

Hilario Ruiz has been a school secretary for 12 years. As of this spring she took leave from Washington Heights Elementary School to complete her last few hours of coursework to prepare for teaching in the fall. Come January of 1992, Ms. Ruiz will be a certified teacher preparing to teach in the Fort Worth ISD.

And now for our most exciting news, I would like for you to meet our first graduate, Diana Puente. Diana came into our program in 1988. She had begun to work for the district in 1985 as an instructional aide at Sam Rosen Elementary School. While attending Tarrant County Junior College, she had distinguished herself with a 3.75 grade point average and at the completion of 60 hours she was recommended to our program by the Dean of Student Development, Dr. Judith Carrier. Dr. Carrier characterized Diana as a "real star." We certainly found that to be true. As she continued her studies at Texas Wesleyan University, she maintained that GPA and graduated in December of 1990 with a 3.57 grade point average.

Diana has completed her student teaching, has taken and passed the examination for certification for teachers in Texas, and is now ready to embark on her teaching career. At a recent School Board meeting, she was recognized by the superintendent and the Board of Education.

The teacher shortage issue is far from being solved and certainly our program is only a small beginning but even here we have planned to enlarge

the program. This year, in 1991, for the first time we are establishing Future Teachers of America chapters on each campus within our district. Using those organizations and Future Educators of America Organizations on our campuses as a focal point to provide a mechanism for encouraging young graduating seniors to become involved in teacher preparation.

In addition, we have a special program that we are initiating (1991) in cooperation with Tarrant County Junior College, called "First-Timers". This is a program where we will recruit graduating high school seniors who will begin coursework during the summer of 1991 in an academic preparation program at one of the Tarrant County Junior College campuses. Beginning the second summer semester, the "First Timers" will enroll in 6 hours. One class will be geared strictly to orientate them to what's ahead in college life.

These youngsters will be kept together as a group for the first two years at Tarrant County Junior College and their academic preparation will lead toward teacher certification. Following their completion of coursework at Tarrant County Junior College, these persons will be focused toward the participating senior colleges. We believe, that for the first time, we will have a much broadened approach and bring a lot more people into our teacher development program. We certainly look forward to having great success in this new phase of our program. The youngsters are enthusiastic, the college and universities are willing to help us in recruiting students for the program and will be vital resources in nurturing them through this developmental process.

The future of this program and other programs similar to this is unlimited. There are a great number of people who are interested in becoming teachers. For working parents and full time wage-earners who are interested in becoming certified teachers, the vital elements of success are scholarship support for these persons, time away from their job to pursue coursework, moral support, counseling and guidance. The colleges and universities work with us to provide financial counseling, financial support in the form of loans or scholarships, also academic counseling and academic support even so far as providing tutoring and other support needed to help each individual student succeed in their selected program. We find the Cooperative Teacher Aide-Scholar Program to be workable, the guidelines reasonable and achievable, the Grade Point Average is attainable, the annual stipend provides an additional incentive but most of all the scholarship support and the paid time away from work enable these Aide-Scholars to make significant progress toward their goals of teacher certification. It is a program that any district can pursue.

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